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Concepts of Policing during the Russian Revolution, 1917-18

Murray Frame

One of the immediate consequences of the February Revolution, especially in Petrograd, was the rapid and almost complete dissolution of the tsarist police system. Yet none of the revolutionaries envisaged post-tsarist Russia without some kind of police system, and even before the final collapse of the old regime efforts were underway to assign some of the basic tasks of policing to a range of improvised organisations. In order to emphasise the break with the past, the term 'police' (politsiia) was abandoned in favour of 'militia' (militsiia). However, there was no single unified 'militia' during 1917, and although the word was regularly used by contemporaries in the singular tense, in reality it described a variety of separate organisations including: a largely theoretical state militia that the Provisional Government hoped would replace the tsarist police; autonomous municipal (or city) militias established by local dumas; voluntary workers' militias, usually linked to individual factories or city districts; and, by spring 1917, Red Guard units. Workers' militias and Red Guard units were usually formed spontaneously -- in other words, without any central coordination - - and the Provisional Government found it impossible to wield any influence over them. Despite its paramilitary connotations and the fact that many local militias were armed, the militia was, for the most part, regarded as a regular civilian police force, not as a substitute army; of the main political forces in 1917, only the Bolsheviks conceived of the militia as 'the people in arms'.

The complex process of militia formation and organisation during the Russian Revolution has been explored in great detail by Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, V. I. Startsev, and Rex Wade, among others, and their work forms an essential starting point for any study of policing during 1917, particularly as a factor in understanding the shifting loci of power in Petrograd. This article focuses on a related but more specific question: to what extent did the revolution transform ideas about the purpose of the police system, i.e. its functions and scope? By its very nature the revolution created an opportunity to separate past from present, to reinvent the structures, functions, and ideological rationales of a whole range of political, social, economic and cultural institutions. The swift demise of the tsarist police presented contemporary political actors with the challenge of defining the functions and scope of the militia as a new civilian police system. What would it be for? To what extent were the purposes of formal policing reconceptualised?

To explore these questions, the article draws upon press and pamphlet commentary about the militia during 1917, as well as official statements and statutes issued by the Provisional Government and Bolshevik authorities. The question of the militia's purpose overlapped with debates about its organisational structure and its relationship to the state, as will become apparent, but the primary aim here is to highlight the question of functions and scope. It will be suggested that, despite the political radicalism of the revolution -- and indeed the potentially radical implications of a centrifugal militia-style police force -- concepts of policing after the February Revolution were quite conventional. Even the Bolsheviks, despite conceptualising the militia as 'the people in arms', ultimately legislated for a civilian police force that was not fundamentally different from its predecessors, at least in terms of its formally ascribed functions. Moreover, ideas about civilian policing in Russia during the revolution echoed some long-standing European models, and it is important to acknowledge this transnational context. The article begins with a consideration of that wider perspective, and after a brief overview of policing before the revolution it then considers the immediate reasons for the emergence of militias during the February Revolution. It then looks in turn at key conceptualisations of the militia that were debated during 1917. These are drawn from statements found in publications of the Kadets, the Provisional Government, the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries, and the Bolsheviks (although it should be emphasised that, whilst each statement reflected a particular view of the militia, it did not constitute a formal party position). The article concludes with a discussion of the Bolshevik regime's first full decree on the militia, promulgated in October 1918. The focus is on the short-term impact of the revolution (1917-18), rather than longer-term consequences for policing during the early Soviet period (1920-30s).

Historians agree that the development of modern policing has been so contingent upon local circumstance, and its functions and organisational forms so varied, that it is practically impossible to generalise about its origins and purposes (Barrie, p. 444; Finnane, p. 457). Here I want to highlight two particular models of 'policing' that help to contextualise the efforts of the new Russian authorities and other political actors to define the scope and purpose of the militia during 1917-18. The first is the idea of policing as public administration, which developed in Europe from the seventeenth century onwards as part of the efforts of absolutist states to regulate their societies and organise their resources more effectively and systematically. The concept of 'police' in that context was influenced by Cameralism -- the science of public administration -- and was broadly coterminous with the rational organization of a polity. The earliest summary of this idea was Nicolas de La Mare's

Traité de police (Paris, 1722), which enumerated the basic principles of what Marc Raeff later termed the ‘well-ordered police state’ (Raeff 1975, p. 1235). The essential idea of the ‘well-ordered police state’ was that the state should take responsibility for the welfare of its population, which in turn meant that it should be more active than passive, more interventionist than reactive.

In this conception, policing encompassed an extraordinarily wide range of activities. William Blackstone’s definition of ‘police’ in his Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765) was so broad that one scholar claimed that it covered ‘the entire domestic policy of a nation’ (Fosdick, p. 3). A good illustration of this breadth is the remit of the first Russian police force, established by Peter the Great in St Petersburg in 1718 -- the first time the word ‘police’ (politsiia) was used officially in the Russian empire -- and modelled on the system pioneered in Paris under Louis XIV. In addition to enforcing city sanitation and building standards, the new force was required to ‘inspect foods, test weights and measures for accuracy, and preserve the tidy appearance of civilized life’; its very first assignment was ‘to hunt wolves and put out fires’ (Monas, p. 363). Viewed from the perspective of Enlightenment Europe, therefore, modern policing was closely connected to administrative tasks defined by the supervisory Cameralist state.

The second model is the ‘Peelite’ one, associated with the London Metropolitan Police force established by Robert Peel in 1829 and adopted in other parts of the English-speaking world such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The theoretical essence of this model is its focus on the interests of citizens rather than the state: it posits a decentralised police force that derives its legitimacy from the people (the idea of ‘policing by consent’). Its primary function, moreover, is to protect the safety of the public, rather than to carry out state-administrative tasks (Johansen, pp. 500-1). As Clive Emsley observes, Whig historians of British policing argue that the Peelite police were established ‘because of an awareness of rising crime and increasing public disorder’ (Emsley 2011, p. xii). One of the most forceful advocates of this position was Charles Reith, who, between 1938 and 1956, wrote several books about the history of British policing. Reith argued that industrialisation and urbanisation led to growing disorder that was only brought under control by the creation of a ‘Preventive Police’ in the nineteenth century (Reith 1943). Whilst these two models impose a level of abstraction on the history of policing that masks a far more complex reality (Emsley 1999), they nevertheless represent significant ways in which policing has been conceptualised, and both are to be found in the discourse about the militia during the Russian

Revolution. That discourse can therefore be situated in the wider context of policing history, and not simply in the dynamics of the 1917 revolution.

Prior to 1917 civilian policing in Russia developed largely along the same lines as most other European countries. The police force was a centralised state organ, administered from the early nineteenth century by a Department of Police under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The formal responsibilities of the police were broad and included maintaining public order, ensuring the safety of the population, dealing with complaints, and tracking down deserters and people who avoided work (Potemkina, p. 480); in other words, the police system was primarily a public administration apparatus. The investigation of specific crimes against individuals (murder, rape) and property (theft) was a relatively low priority, as was the case in most of Europe, with the partial exception of Britain after 1829. The first detective department with the express purpose of investigating crimes was established in St Petersburg in 1866, but it was not until 1908 that others appeared beyond the imperial capital (Abbott 1977, p. 74; Rubtsov, pp. 164-65). Proposals to streamline its responsibilities were occasionally put forward (Abbott 1973, pp. 296-99), but as the head of the Department of Police M. I. Trusevich observed in 1908, the police force remained ‘the universal apparatus for fulfilling the tasks of every other branch of government’ (Weissman, p. 56).

The emphasis on the police as an instrument of the state was reinforced by the activity of the political security police (as distinct from the civilian police), which until 1880 was the remit of a separate organisation. Between 1826 and 1880, political and security policing was carried out by the Third Section, staffed mainly by gendarmes (i.e., units of soldiers who remained in the pay of the army but whose duties overlapped with civilian matters). In 1880 the Third Section was replaced by the Division for the Protection of Order and Public Security, which now came under the auspices of the Department of Police. The new Division oversaw the work of a series of security divisions (*okhrannye otdeleniia*) across the empire -- still staffed by gendarmes -- which became known colloquially as the ‘okhrana’ or ‘okhranka’. Although the regular and security branches of the police apparatus were now merged under one department, their personnel and functions generally remained separate.

By 1900 the Department of Police employed 47,866 personnel. There were 21,533 regular patrolmen and approximately 11,000 security police personnel (Weissman, p. 47; Leggett, p. xxiii). By the eve of the First World War, civilian police numbers in urban centres were broadly comparable to those of other major European cities; Berlin and Paris had marginally more policemen per number of inhabitants than St Petersburg and in that

sense were more 'policed' (Fosdick, pp. 401-2). The Russian countryside, however, had small numbers of police relative to the size of its population: by 1900 rural areas were policed by a total of 1582 constables (stanovoi pristav) and 6874 sergeants (uriadnik), who were responsible for a widely scattered population of about 90 million people, meaning that, on average, each policeman was responsible for more than ten thousand people (Weissman, p.49).

The events of the February Revolution demonstrated that, although tsarist Russia's civilian police force was not especially large by comparative standards, it had a reputation as a steadfast pillar and hated symbol of the old order. The British consular official in Moscow at the time, Robert Bruce Lockhart, later recalled that the police 'were especially hated because none of them had been sent to the war' (Bruce Lockhart, p. 24). This hostility was reinforced during the early days and weeks of the revolution as the police made sporadic attempts to quash the popular uprising in Petrograd, which in turn generated a wave of attacks against them. As the mood of insurrection escalated, individual policemen began to disappear from their stationary posts across the capital. They remained visible in patrols for slightly longer but were soon 'disarmed in many places without offering serious resistance' (Sukhanov, pp. 16, 19, 26; Shliapnikov, p. 85). A pivotal moment came on 26 February when troops from the Pavlovsky Regiment, which was on the verge of siding with the revolution, clashed with mounted police who were trying to disperse a crowd by shooting at it (Sukhanov, pp. 28-9). Some of the last okhrana reports spoke of 'attacks against the police' in response to such incidents (Browder and Kerensky, pp. 34-36). In the very first issue of Izvestiia, the Petrograd Soviet, in an appeal to soldiers, claimed that 'remnants of the police, Black Hundreds and other scoundrels' were positioned on the roofs of houses and apartments and should be removed by 'a well-aimed bullet or regular attack'.¹ Police stations and okhrana archives were ransacked, and by the time Nicholas II abdicated on 2 March the police system had all but evaporated in the capital (Musaev, pp. 11-12; Hasegawa 1973, p. 303). Its collapse elsewhere in the former empire soon followed, although the process was less sudden.

For both the Petrograd Soviet and the Provisional Government, as well as for the myriad spontaneously-formed militias in the capital and elsewhere, the predominant reason for seeking quickly to replace the tsarist police was a concern for order (poriadok). 'Order' in this context generally meant guarding against crime and ensuring the safety of citizens.

¹ Izvestiia, 28 February 1917 (No. 1), p. 2.

The February Revolution was accompanied by a dramatic upsurge in crime, especially in Petrograd and Moscow, a consequence of the general collapse of authority, as well as the release from prison of hundreds of criminals alongside political prisoners (Hasegawa, 1992; Musaev, p. 25; Koval', pp. 6-7). In the first issue of *Izvestiia*, the Soviet called upon soldiers to carry out some basic policing functions, imploring them not to allow 'hooligans to hurt peaceful citizens' or to 'ransack shops or rob apartments'.² A supplement to the paper, published on the same day, expressed alarm at the spread of hooliganism and robbery. 'Gangs of hooligans' were starting to roam the city and rob 'shops and the property of inhabitants'. 'The revolutionary people and the army in no circumstances can permit this'; hooligans must be arrested and despatched to the Commandant of the State Duma (presumably Boris A. Engel'gardt, head of the newly-formed Military Commission of the State Duma). Concern was also expressed about 'aimless shooting' in the streets, which was deemed a waste of the ammunition that might be required in the struggle to consolidate the revolution. Revolutionary patrols were called upon to disarm the perpetrators.³

It should be noted that, although the Soviet initially called upon the army and -- rather more nebulously -- the 'revolutionary people' to take responsibility for the restoration of order, the use of soldiers for policing was only intended as an immediate short-term measure born of alarm at the apparent breakdown of order. It would become evident during the following weeks and months that the Soviet hoped to maintain a clear distinction between the role of the army -- including armed defence of the revolution -- and civilian policing. At approximately the same time as its appeal to soldiers, at 4 a.m. on the morning of 28 February the Soviet Executive Committee called upon factory workers to establish militias consisting of 100 people for every thousand workers, and whilst nothing was said about their purpose, it soon became clear that militias would function primarily as localised police forces.⁴

Almost simultaneously, the Provisional Committee of the State Duma -- which was about to be reformed as the Provisional Government -- issued its own call for the formation of a militia. During the early hours of 1 March, the Military Commission asked Dmitry A. Kryzhanovskii -- an architect and deputy of the Petrograd municipal дума -- to 'Organize the militia on behalf of the public organizations of Petrograd, for the purpose of maintaining order on the streets of Petrograd' (Browder and Kerensky, p. 57). In fact, this request simply 'rubber-stamped' a decision of the municipal дума the previous day to appoint

² *Izvestiia*, 28 February 1917 (No. 1), p. 2.

³ *Izvestiia*, 28 February 1917, supplement (*pribavlenie*) to No. 1, p. 2.

⁴ *Izvestiia*, 28 February 1917 (No. 1), p. 2.

Kryzhanovskii as commander of the municipal militia (Wade, p. 44). On the same day Mikhail A. Karaulov, a member of the Provisional Committee of the State Duma, issued guidelines for military units and the militia regarding arrests. These guidelines provide an insight into the specific kinds of disorder that concerned the Provisional Committee at that particular moment (they are less valuable as an insight into how the new authorities envisaged the role of the militia in general). They provided a list of categories of people who were to be arrested immediately upon apprehension:

- 1) inebriates;
- 2) burglars, arsonists, persons shooting into the air and, in general, disrupting peace and order in the capital;
- 3) those who offer resistance to persons with any special powers delegated to them by the Provisional Government [sic], or to persons employed for the protection of the town;
- 4) all ranks of the regular and secret police and the corps of gendarmes;
- 5) all persons who carry out searches of private residences or arrests of private persons and, also, of army personnel, without having any special authorization from the Provisional Government for such [action].

Referring to the release of non-political prisoners and their apparent contribution to the sudden growth in crime, Karaulov stated: ‘These murderers, thieves, and burglars, disguising themselves in uniforms of the lower [military] ranks, are brazenly bursting into private residences, carrying out illegal searches, robbing, raping, and bringing on terror.’ All were to be arrested, and ‘shot in the event of resistance’ (Browder and Kerensky, pp. 61-2).

Karaulov’s injunction that officials of the tsarist police were to be arrested prompted a more pragmatic approach from the Provisional Government, which announced on 4 March that, as long as they ‘were not compromised by their previous activities’, Petrograd police officials were not to be arrested (Browder and Kerensky, p. 163). Lest there was any lingering doubt that the old police system was at an end, however, the Provisional Government also announced on 4 March that the okhrana, the gendarmes and the railway police were to be abolished and their employees enlisted for military service (Browder and Kerensky, p. 192). This was followed on 10 March by the formal abolition of the Department of Police. In its place the Provisional Government established a ‘temporary administration for the public police [obshchestvennaia politsiia]’, as part of the Ministry of

Internal Affairs, for ‘the protection of the person and property of citizens’ (a rare occurrence of the word ‘politsiia’ to describe such organisations in the post-February period).⁵

The urgency to organise a replacement for the tsarist police therefore stemmed mainly from a determination to combat a sudden wave of crime and ‘hooliganism’. Nikolai Sukhanov suggested that the response was successful: ‘It was to them [the new voluntary militias] that Petersburg was so greatly indebted for the swift restoration of order and security’ (Sukhanov, p. 98). Subsequent research, however, has shown persuasively that crime remained a major social problem in the capital throughout 1917, and that the new militias struggled to deal with it (Hasegawa, 1992). Nevertheless, it is clear that the militia, in its different guises, was initially conceived only as a ‘preventive police’ for the purpose of counteracting a dramatic rise in disorder. In the months after the February Revolution, as the authorities endeavoured to impose a unitary structure on the myriad militia organisations, differing views about what should be the functions and scope of policing in post-tsarist Russia became evident. The remainder of this article will look at key conceptualisations of the militia that circulated during the revolution, based on materials relating to the Kadets, the Provisional Government, the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries, and the Bolsheviks.

The first general statement on policing by the Kadets (Constitutional Democrats) -- the dominant party in the first Provisional Government -- following the collapse of tsarism was written by N. A. Lenskii and appeared in the party’s newspaper Rech’ on 14 March. Lenskii stated that an essential task of the new militia should be protection of the emerging ‘legal order’ (pravoporiadok) and the ‘personal and property rights of citizens’. But he also argued for the reestablishment of a professional police force with a wider range of responsibilities. Whilst the collapse of the old police system had compelled people to organise various kinds of voluntary militias to protect their property, this did not absolve the authorities of the responsibility to establish a more permanent policing organization. In Lenskii’s view, a militia system that was too variegated and reliant upon volunteers -- who would gradually drift away because they had other occupations -- would be incapable of ‘carrying out, in the interests of citizens and the new state structure, the various functions that lay with the old police, the functions of a so-called executive police’. Echoing the Cameralist idea of police, Lenskii alluded to a range of administrative tasks that, by implication, he believed should be the remit of the militia: ‘Our everyday life is closely linked with the need to have on various occasions different certificates, testimonies, information. On the other

⁵ Sobranie zakononii i rasporiazhenii pravitel’sstva, 13 April 1917 (No. 79), p. 668.

hand, there are instances when all the organs of governmental and public authority need to issue requests and information for the notification of citizens'. He acknowledged that reform of the police would take time, but in the meantime the municipal militia should not only safeguard 'order and safety', it should also assume the functions of an 'executive police'. Lenskii therefore envisioned a new police organisation that would serve the interests of the state as well as its citizens, and whose scope would be similar to that of the tsarist police; the key difference would be the new militia's regard for legal order.

The assertion of a statist view on policing was no doubt partly a reaction to Kadet anxiety about the diffuse and centrifugal character of voluntary militias (and what that meant for the Provisional Government's ability to stamp its authority on the country), as well as a general conviction that a liberal state should have an effective police force under its command. In this respect, Lenskii expressed concern about the democratic nature of the militias. 'Excessive collegiality', he suggested, could hinder the 'initiative and energy' of militiamen in their work, and discipline could only be guaranteed if the militia's leadership was not bound in any way by the 'elective principle'. The head of the militia should therefore be appointed by the municipal дума. Pre-empting any criticism that his vision of policing for the new Russia was not very 'radical', Lenskii drew a comparison with Britain. Until now, he suggested, Russia and Britain were 'two polar opposites' in terms of how their municipal police forces were organized. 'In this regard we have now come further than not only the countries between [Russia and Britain] but further than even Britain' because, claimed Lenskii, the London Metropolitan police force was not a proper municipal force but subordinate to the state. He therefore concluded: 'it should be clear that the experience of people who have known the blessing of freedom for longer should oblige us to be especially careful in resolving this issue [policing] and not to sacrifice the interests of protecting the new order for the sake of falsely understood principles of democratism'.⁶

Lenskii's position on policing was reflected in the essential elements of the Provisional Government's statute on the formal establishment of a new militia, which was ratified by ministers on 17 April and published on 3 May.⁷ One aim of the statute was to establish central governmental authority over the functions of policing and to give coherence to the wide array of local militias. However, the extent to which this was achieved in practice was limited; the Provisional Government appears not to have gained significant control over the profusion of centrifugal policing organisations during 1917, and the extent to which the

⁶ *Rech'*, 14 March 1917, p. 3.

⁷ *Sobranie zakonov i rasporiazhenii pravitel'stva*, 3 May 1917 (No. 97), pp. 837-43.

statute was acknowledged and implemented at local levels is unclear (indeed unlikely). Its importance here lies in its encapsulation of how the Provisional Government conceptualised and envisaged the role of Russia's new police system.

According to the statute, the militia was to be an 'executive organ of state power in the localities', coming under the 'direct authority of zemstva and municipal public administrations', who were to appoint (and dismiss) local heads of militia. Local authorities would therefore have a key responsibility for militia organisation, and heads of militia would report to them. At the same time, however, the statute emphasised that ultimate authority over the militia resided with the Minister of Internal Affairs, who was responsible not only for the 'general direction of the militia's work' but also for the allocation of its budget at local levels.

Section 4 of the statute set out the 'duties and powers of the militia', and they underlined the Provisional Government's view of the militia as an 'executive police' with a broad remit to carry out various administrative tasks on behalf of the state. The first article of the section (article 18) reflected the primary motivation for the rapid formation of militias during the February Revolution: 'The militia protects public safety and order and defends everyone from any violence, injury and assault.' Article 19, however, broadened the militia's remit by referring not only to 'public order and safety' but also 'matters of public welfare', and it listed ten areas for which the militia was responsible:

- (1) taking measures to end breaches of order, the law or binding decrees;
- (2) timely notification of the population of orders issued by governmental and public authorities, and of announcements and notices issued by them;
- (3) protection of the rights of civil freedom;
- (4) assisting the organs of governmental and public authority in fulfilling their obligations;
- (5) issuing of identity cards, and also all other certificates, information, notices and testimonies stipulated by active decrees, including attestations of poverty;
- (6) maintenance of a population register in areas where such a register is established;
- (7) drawing up of documents and reports about any accidents and acts of violence, as well as any other circumstances if required by citizens for the defence of their rights; [...]

- (8) safeguarding order in public places, as well as protecting the good condition of roads, bridges, brushwood roads, streets, squares and so on, and supervising the traffic on them;
- (9) taking measures for the maintenance of safety and order during fires, floods and other public disasters, as well as providing help at accidents, and
- (10) requesting the assistance of citizens to render help in the event of public disasters and accidents.

Other articles in this section of the statute outlined the militia's role in criminal investigations and prosecutions, administrative matters relating to military personnel, and procedures relating to arrests and reporting.

The emphasis in the Provisional Government's legislation for a new police system therefore lay heavily on the requirements of the 'well-ordered police state'. In fact, article 23 asserted that, in addition to duties already enumerated in the statute, 'officials of the militia are obliged to carry out all legitimate requests of governmental and public authorities'. This echoed the observation of Trusevich in 1908 (quoted above) to the effect that the police system was an administrative instrument for all aspects of government. In this respect, the Provisional Government's understanding of the general purposes of policing after the February Revolution was not significantly different from the wider continental European tradition, or indeed from the scope of civilian policing in tsarist Russia. The model and remit described by the statute of 17 April corresponded to a standard European type. And this underscored the extent to which the adoption of the term 'militia' by the Provisional Government was largely a gesture to the popular revolution and the proliferation of voluntary militias.

It should be noted that, according to the statute's preamble, the organisation of the militia in Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev and Odessa would be covered by special statutes. This seems to have taken some time; only on 14 July did Izvestiia report that the Provisional Government had approved the militia's organisational structure in those cities. Like elsewhere, the militia in Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev and Odessa would be an 'executive organ of state authority' but run directly by local authorities. The only difference seems to have been that the municipal дума would be responsible for hiring and firing the head of the militia in those particular cities.⁸ In essence, this was no different from the arrangement that

⁸ Izvestiia, 14 July 1917, p. 6.

was intended to operate elsewhere, except that the original statute referred to zemstva and municipal public administrations rather than municipal dumas. But the separate treatment probably reflected a more fraught debate about lines of authority over the militia in those cities. In Petrograd, for example, the question of whether the Provisional Government or the municipal дума should exercise authority over the militia remained sharply contested for several months (Hasegawa 2001; Kel'son 2, pp. 151-57).

A different perspective on the purposes of policing following the collapse of tsarism can be found in the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary press. Several of its contributors advocated a police force with a more democratic structure and a narrower remit than Lenskii and the Provisional Government supported, and that some of the voluntary militias claimed for themselves. In its first comment on the issue, in an unattributed piece published on 8 March, the Menshevik newspaper Rabochaia gazeta suggested that some comrades in the Petrograd Soviet were confusing 'two concepts' in the debates about a militia. One concept was the notion of the 'people in arms' who would replace the army and defend the revolution from counter-revolutionary attacks from any remnants of the old regime. According to the Menshevik newspaper, however, such a militia was unnecessary because the army had already sided with revolution.⁹ This point was reiterated by Rabochaia gazeta in late April when the Red Guard emerged, regarded by the Mensheviks as a Bolshevik continuation of the idea that the people -- or more specifically workers -- should be armed to defend the revolution.¹⁰

The other concept was of the militia as a 'civic police force' or 'civic guard' that would replace the tsarist police -- described as having been 'hostile to the people' -- and would protect citizens 'from robberies and excesses' and so forth; this, in fact, was an 'urgent task'. The Provisional Government, pointed out Rabochaia gazeta, was already addressing this issue and had just announced that the police would be reformed into a militia, under the direction of local authorities (a position that was shortly to be enshrined in the statute of 17 April). The responsibility of this new organisation, at a time when it was 'often difficult to distinguish friend from foe', was considerable. Consequently, militiamen should be well remunerated, of high moral standing, and ideally they should be elected.

Only such a militia, relying on the absolute confidence of citizens, will have the authority it needs as a popular organ of power. Only such a civic guard can

⁹ Rabochaia gazeta, 8 March 1917, p. 2.

¹⁰ Rabochaia gazeta, 29 April 1917, pp. 1-2.

successfully fight against hooligans and agents provocateurs, against all the dark forces of reaction, [and] can guarantee safety on the streets and the order of normal life.¹¹

The elective principle contrasted with Lenskii's scepticism about the appropriateness of democracy in the militia, as well as the stipulation of the Provisional Government's statute that heads of militia should be appointed by local authorities, and that all other militiamen should be appointed by heads of militia.

The lengthiest discussion of the militia to appear in Rabochaia gazeta was written by Vladimir M. Shakh, a Menshevik who had organised a militia in the Petrogradskii district of the capital (Wade, pp. 52-3). His article, entitled 'Police-Militia', was printed in the 2 June issue of the newspaper and should therefore be understood in the context of the Provisional Government's statute, published one month earlier. Shakh made two arguments that were pertinent to the question of the militia's functions and scope. First of all, the police system should no longer have a political role like it did in tsarist times, when it was 'the best instrument of authority and oppression, the best bulwark of autocracy'. In Shakh's estimation, which reflected a widely-held view amongst the revolutionary parties, 'The only thing with which the police did not concern itself [before the February Revolution] was the safety of citizens...' The militia, he argued, must be transferred to the authority of municipal organs, where it 'will cease to be an instrument of state authority and can no longer be used for suppression [podavlenie] and oppression [ugnetenie]'. Decentralisation of the militia would ensure that it could not be used for political purposes.

Shakh also argued that the militia had to be freed from many of its previous obligations. Police inquiries, which under the old system failed to uncover the truth and concealed wrongdoing and criminals, should become the responsibility of special organs supervised by jurists. Likewise, the issuing of identity cards would be cheaper for the population if carried out by domestic and civic committees and officials of the municipal administration. And various certificates would be more accurate if overseen by special civic boards. Supervision of sanitary equipment and the quality of foodstuffs would be more effective under the control of public, worker, and professional organisations. What, then, did this leave for the militia? Shakh answered as follows: 'Protection of the safety and inviolability of citizens. I would even say -- to assist citizens in the business of protecting

¹¹ Rabochaia gazeta, 8 March 1917, p. 2.

their safety'.¹² This position clearly differed from the role of the militia outlined in the Provisional Government statute of 17 April, which had envisaged a militia that retained responsibility for issuing identity cards, carrying out sanitary checks, and so forth (i.e., an apparatus to support a 'well-ordered police state'). For Shakh, the new police system should have a more restricted role and not be considered part of a state system of general regulation.

Similar sentiments were expressed by M. Krushinskii, writing in the Socialist Revolutionary newspaper Delo naroda in response to the Provisional Government's statute. Krushinskii asserted that, whilst the militia was important for ensuring 'calm and order ... its jurisdiction and authority must be strictly limited' in order to prevent 'the possibility of the militia threatening the freedom of the population, the possibility of a revival of a "cadre of neighbourhood autocrats", which the [previous] police system was'. This could not be achieved simply by limiting the militia's remit; it would also have to be subject to the authority of local self-government, to ensure that power did not become concentrated in the head of the militia. In other words, the militia must have a 'strictly democratic structure'. The problem with the Provisional Government's statute, in Krushinskii's view, was that it defined the militia as an executive organ of the state, and its 'jurisdiction completely corresponds to the jurisdiction of the previous police system'. This entailed a wide range of functions that would be better fulfilled by organs of local self-government.¹³

Contributors to the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary press therefore provided an alternative conceptualisation of the militia, its functions and scope. The key elements were democratic accountability within the militia, alongside its decentralisation to municipal authorities in order to prevent political misuse of the policing apparatus by the state, and a narrower set of functions than those formally granted by the Provisional Government's statute. This position therefore reflected the original priority of the militias that were formed during the February Revolution to guarantee order and the safety of citizens. As a model of policing, we can also note that, in its emphasis on 'policing by consent' and ensuring the safety of citizens, this view of the militia had much in common with the Peelite idea of a preventive police.

Finally, another distinctive perspective on the militia was provided by the Bolsheviks. Throughout 1917 the Bolsheviks argued that the militia was one of the main instruments by which the working class could exercise power, prevent counter-revolution, and guarantee its freedom from oppression. In other words, they viewed the militia in exclusive class terms;

¹² Rabochaia gazeta, 2 June 1917, pp. 2-3.

¹³ Delo naroda, 16 May 1917, p. 1.

its central purpose was to protect and advance the interests of the proletariat. This was not simply ideological rhetoric that bore no correspondence to reality: after the February Revolution there was an organisational distinction between the municipal militia and the myriad voluntary workers' militias based in and around factories, including, from April, the Red Guards. For the Bolsheviks, it was those specific sections of the militia that should become Russia's new permanent police force: 'It is not a temporary organisation for the needs of the moment', asserted Pravda as early as 8 March 1917, 'It is a workers' army, self-governing and holding in its hands the order in worker districts'. This workers' army, continued Pravda, provided the 'certainty that freedom is not an empty phrase but a living reality'. The 'fundamental defect' of the new municipal militia was the fact that it was organised by the 'old municipal administration', which created conflict between municipal and district militiamen; the only way to organise the militia was 'from below, self-organisation'.¹⁴ Nor was the notion of the militia as a proletarian 'army' a mere figure of speech for the Bolsheviks. During 1917 they consistently argued that only a well-armed people could defend its freedom, a task that in the meantime fell to the workers' militias and Red Guards. Calling for an 'army of the proletariat', a 'Red guard of the proletariat', Vladimir Bonch-Bruевич -- brother of the tsarist military commander Mikhail -- pointed to Switzerland as an example of a country where freedom was guaranteed not by a standing army but by a popular militia.¹⁵

These points were elaborated by Lenin in an article for Pravda published on 20 April, seventeen days after his return to Russia from exile. The essence of Lenin's comments on the militia was that the people should govern and police themselves. But for the Bolshevik leader, the 'people' (narod) meant specifically the proletariat (as well as the poorest strata of the peasantry), and the question of the militia's status was part of a struggle between classes. In Lenin's view, the government of landowners and capitalists was trying to make the militia accountable to it, to make the militia stand 'apart from the people'. This had to be countered by a 'universal arming of the people', by a militia that was not separate from the police and the army, but replaced them entirely. Rejecting the Menshevik position that it was unnecessary to arm the proletariat, Lenin argued that unless 'workers and soldiers can blend into a single national militia', the old 'apparatus of oppression will remain in place', ready to serve the aims of counter-revolution. This was also, for Lenin, part of the process of building

¹⁴ Pravda, 8 March 1917, p. 2.

¹⁵ Pravda, 18 March 1917, p. 2.

a new state apparatus from below, which was necessary for the protection and advancement of the revolution.

To replace the old organs of oppression -- police, bureaucracy, standing army -- with a universal arming of the people, actually a universal militia, this is the only way to guarantee, to the greatest extent, against restoration of monarchy, and to make possible a systematic, firm and decisive move towards socialism, not by 'bringing it in' from above but by raising the enormous masses of proletarians and semi-proletarians to the art of state administration, to the direction of all state authority.¹⁶

Lenin developed this argument in more detail in his pamphlet State and Revolution (written during August and September 1917 but not published until 1918), notably in chapter three where he discussed Marx's analysis of the Paris Commune and its lessons for the organisation of a post-revolutionary state.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Bolsheviks were highly critical of the Provisional Government's description of the militia as an 'executive organ of state power' which, they argued, was tantamount to a restoration of the tsarist police system in all but name. Shortly after the publication of the Provisional Government's statute on the militia, Pravda called for a 'decisive struggle against the restoration of the old type of police under the new name of militia', which, it claimed, the Kadets were instigating, along with other 'capitalist parties', and even with the compliance of the Narodniks (i.e., Socialist Revolutionaries) and Mensheviks. Instead, what Pravda described as a 'militia of the police type' should be replaced by 'compulsory public-militia service of all adult citizens of both sexes'. Citizens would work in shifts in this militia, whilst retaining their main occupations; it would be self-governing, based on the elective principle, and have access to arms.¹⁷ Similarly, a city-wide conference of Petrograd worker-militiamen on 27 May, organised by Vyborg district Bolsheviks, expressed its objection to the municipal militia headed by Kryzhanovskii because its purpose was 'the full restoration, under the title of militia, of a police force of the west European type, hated by the majority of people across the world, mainly the poorest classes' (Erykalov, p. 75). This underscored the extent to which, for the Bolsheviks during 1917, the militia question was fundamentally about the location of power

¹⁶ Pravda, 20 April 1917, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷ Pravda, 7 May 1917, p. 3.

in the context of class struggle; the party's focus was less on the specific functions and scope of the militia, more on its relationship to the state and the people. Ultimately the militia had to become a different kind of organisation altogether from that envisaged by the Bolsheviks' political adversaries.

One of the few Bolshevik statements about the militia during 1917 to provide any detail about what its practical tasks might be -- aside from the general task of defending the revolution -- was provided by M. Vatin, a Bolshevik activist, pamphleteer, and member of the editorial boards of both Pravda and Izvestiia (more widely known by his pseudonym, V. A. Bystrianskii). In a pamphlet published in spring 1917, entitled Not the Police, but a National Militia, Vatin echoed Lenin's position on the militia. He argued that the revolutionary struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat was partly a struggle between different conceptions of the state, one in which the people would suffer oppression at the hands of the army, bureaucracy, and police, and one in which the people would exercise real power by running the state apparatus themselves. In the latter model, the police would be replaced by a national militia: 'Power must belong to all the people, not in word but in deed; organised and armed, the people must rule' (Vatin, p. 3). Although Vatin did not explicitly enumerate the specific functions of a national militia, he referred throughout the pamphlet to the crises in housing and the supply of bread and other basic necessities:

A national militia means that the wealthy classes will no longer have privileges in the matter of receipt of products, that supervision of the distribution of products will not remain on paper [na bumage], that supervision of the sanitary conditions of life and labour will not be a simple innocent wish. Citizens themselves, called to compulsory service in the militia, will deal better with the matter of protecting order and safety in the country, with sanitary supervision, with the distribution of products, than a professional police force that is alien to the people and isolated from it (Vatin, p. 10).

Vatin also stressed that women should serve in the militia, although perhaps he perpetuated a gender stereotype in suggesting that women would be 'excellent' at dealing with 'sanitary and hygiene' matters, as well as the 'distribution of products' (Vatin, p. 10). But in providing some insight into what a new militia might actually do, he emphasised how it could empower people to address their immediate practical needs.

After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks' radical vision of civilian policing was quickly tempered by the exigencies of rising crime, nascent civil war and deepening economic crisis. The new regime's initial aim was to expand the number of workers' militias. On 28 October the Internal Affairs Commissariat instructed local soviets to establish their own militias, staffed on a part-time basis by workers who would retain their main occupations; along with the Red Guards, they would be responsible for civilian policing (Prokopenko and Romanov, pp. 16, 22). On 2 December the Provisional Government's militia structure was formally abolished (Mulukaev, p. 96). During 1918, however, as a result of several interconnected processes -- all linked to early Bolshevik state-building -- the militia was transformed into a centralised state organ: the Red Guards were absorbed into the nascent Red Army; the constitution of the Soviet republic (July 1918) effectively ended the autonomy of local soviets and, by extension, their militias; and in October 1918 a new department of the Internal Affairs Commissariat, Glavmilitsiia, was established to run what would now be a professional and permanently-staffed police force.

On 20 October 1918 the Internal Affairs and Justice commissariats published a Decree on the Organisation of the Soviet Worker-Peasant Militia (Instructions), signed by Grigorii Petrovskii (Internal Affairs commissar) and Dmitrii Kurskii (Justice commissar).¹⁸ This was the first full statement from the Soviet government regarding the functions and scope of the militia. The decree's opening sentence explained that the 'instructions' were intended as a 'temporary measure' to deal with 'extraordinary conditions' and to protect the 'revolutionary order'. Article 2 described the militia as 'an executive organ of the Worker-Peasant Central power in the localities, under the direct authority of local Soviets, and subject to the general direction of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs'. This formulation was almost identical to the corresponding part of the Provisional Government statute, with the substitution of 'Worker-Peasant Central power' for 'state power', and of 'local Soviets' for 'zemstva and municipal public administrations'. In fact, the decree in most respects appears to be little more than a revised version of the Provisional Government statute, updated to reflect the advent of Soviet power but largely unchanged in its essentials. This is particularly apparent in the section that described the areas for which the Soviet militia was to have authority (articles 25-28).

¹⁸ Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporiazhenii rabochego i krest'ianskogo pravitel'stva, 20 October 1918 (No. 75), pp. 921-26.

Article 25 reasserted the Bolsheviks' class-based view of the militia and its overall role: 'The Soviet Militia guards the interests of the working class and poorest peasants. Its main responsibility is protection of the revolutionary order and civilian safety' (the corresponding part of the Provisional Government statute, article 18, required the militia to protect all citizens). The decree's similarity to the earlier statute was evident in article 26, which listed the tasks of the militia in more detail. Like the Provisional Government's version, it contained ten points, quoted here in full:

The militia has authority for:

- (1) Preventing and combatting violations of the order established by Soviet power, its decrees and instructions;
- (2) Strictly supervising the implementation by all citizens of the decrees, laws and instructions of Central Worker-Peasant power with regard to record-keeping, distribution, and observance of fixed prices relating to the products of industry and agriculture (bread monopoly, distribution of fabrics, etc.);
- (3) Timely notification of the population about instructions of the Soviet authorities;
- (4) Assisting the Soviet authorities by implementing the obligations placed on them;
- (5) Drawing up of documents and reports about violations of order, crimes, misdemeanours and incidents, both those discovered by the Militia itself and those made known to it by institutions and individuals;

Note: supplementary instructions about the correct way of drawing up reports will follow.

- (6) Supervising the fulfilment of sanitary regulations and measures undertaken by the People's Commissariat of Public Health and local organs of Soviet power;
- (7) Safeguarding order in public places, as well as ensuring the good condition of roads, bridges, brushwood roads, streets, squares and so on, and supervising the traffic on them;
- (8) Taking measures for maintaining safety and order during fires, floods and other public disasters, as well as providing help in unfortunate accidents;
- (9) Issuing of identity cards, labour books [trudovye knigi] and other certificates, information, notices and testimonies, in circumstances allowed for by instructions of the Central Worker-Peasant authority;

- (10) Calling on citizens to render help in the event of public disasters, unfortunate accidents and individual counter-revolutionary manifestations.

Each of these points, for the most part, replicated the Provisional Government's list of militia responsibilities. In both documents -- Bolshevik decree and Provisional Government statute -- point 1 required the militia to enforce law and order. Points 7-10 of the Bolshevik decree were almost identical to the corresponding parts of the Provisional Government statute (although the order in which they were listed was slightly different). In points 8 and 9 the word translated here as 'public' was obshchestvennyi in the April 1917 statute; Petrovskii and Kurskii (or officials in their commissariats) substituted the word narodnyi for the updated version of October 1918, which in Russian has a more populist connotation than obshchestvennyi, but in terms of the militia's ascribed tasks, this minor amendment had little practical significance. Only points 2 and 6, covering economic distribution and health matters, were substantively new and obviously reflected specific priorities of the Bolshevik regime (incidentally, both were matters that Vatin had alluded to in his pamphlet of spring 1917). They replaced points 3 and 6 from the Provisional Government statute: the militia was no longer enjoined to protect civil freedoms or to maintain population registers. The remaining articles in the section of the decree that set out the militia's areas of authority related to procedures for criminal investigation.

By only modifying the Provisional Government statute, rather than producing an entirely new one based on radical ideas about the militia enunciated by the Bolsheviks during 1917, the decree of October 1918 indicated that the role of the militia would remain largely unchanged, at least in terms of its formally ascribed functions. The militia would be an instrument of public administration, with responsibility not only for law and order, but for a range of welfare and supervisory matters -- an apparatus for a 'well-ordered police state' of the standard European type. How are we to account for the strong current of continuity in how policing was formally conceptualised after the October Revolution, especially in view of the divergent position on the militia taken by the Bolsheviks during 1917?

First of all, it seems clear that the militia's status and functions were determined by the urgent imperatives of state-building during 1918. As the Bolsheviks confronted rising crime, civil war, foreign intervention and economic chaos, they could ill-afford to leave matters of law and order, as well as the broader supervision of economy and society, to a plethora of autonomous, self-organising and semi-professional units. In that context, the appeal of the 'well-ordered police state' with a centralised apparatus to enforce and supervise

a wide range of government measures seems obvious. The Provisional Government's statute provided a ready-made description of what such an 'executive police' would mean in practice; and we cannot dismiss the possibility that, in the midst of growing crisis, there was simply insufficient time to write an entirely new decree; the priority was to provide shape and purpose to the militia as a centralised unitary police system, and an amended version of the April 1917 statute would suffice. Secondly, the creation of the Cheka in December 1917, as a political security police tasked with combatting counter-revolution and sabotage (Leggett, p. 17), implied that, in theory, the militia would remain a conventional civilian police force; its functions and scope could remain largely unchanged because the Cheka would deal with 'extraordinary' matters. But the militia nevertheless required clarification of its role under the Soviet government, hence the publication of the October 1918 decree.

In practice, as the civil war intensified, the militia worked closely with the Cheka, and the operational lines of distinction between the two organisations were blurred (Hagenloh, pp. 28-29). After the civil war, the role of the militia continued to develop beyond the functions delineated in the October 1918 decree. In 1930 it was amalgamated with the political security police and became increasingly involved, as an active participant, in the 'social engineering' of the Stalin period (Hagenloh). To some extent, this was prefigured by the concept of the militia as component of a 'well-ordered police state', a concept that survived intact during 1917-18; ideas about the functions and scope of the militia after the revolution, however, are beyond the purview of this article.

This article has considered some of the main commentaries and statements about the militia during 1917-18 in order to gauge how far the Russian Revolution transformed ideas about the functions and scope of policing. The evidence suggests that, despite the potentially radical implications of the centrifugal militia system that existed during the first year of the revolution, most of the main political actors advocated conventional models of policing. By way of conclusion, I would like to emphasise the ostensible commonalities that most of these ideas had with wider European concepts of policing. Following the rapid improvisation of militias during the February Revolution, the discourse about the purpose of the new police system (as well as its structure and relationship to the authorities) echoed long-standing European models. The liberal stance taken by Lenskii and encapsulated in the Provisional Government statute of April 1917 envisaged the militia as a public administrative apparatus, much in line with the Cameralist principles that underpinned the development of continental

European police systems from the seventeenth century onwards (including that of tsarist Russia).

The Bolsheviks' concept of the militia as 'the people in arms', clearly the most radical position in 1917, derived to some extent from their understanding of the Paris Commune, but after the October Revolution the model of the 'well-ordered police state' quickly regained favoured status. Other contributors to the debate expressed strong reservations about both of these concepts: a centralised 'executive police' was potentially an instrument of oppression; and arming the people was unnecessary because the military already supported the revolution. Instead, the militia should be a decentralised, democratically accountable police force, and its main task should be to protect the safety of citizens. These views were similar to the Peelite model of a preventive police that gained favour in Britain during the nineteenth century. The same might also be said of the improvised voluntary militias that proliferated after the collapse of tsarism, with the caveat that they acted from necessity (to restore order) and, for the most part, without extended reflection on the organisational principles that motivated them.

None of this is to deny that the revolutionary discourse about policing had its own internal dynamic. Clearly the question about the purpose of the militia was closely bound up with real concerns about order, crime, and hooliganism, and it also reflected competing notions of the relationship between state and society, as well as different political ideologies. But it also intersected with a wider context, namely the pan-European historical development of policing. Viewed from that perspective, the revolution did not transform ideas about policing (at least in the short-term), but it did create a public arena in which different models from the European (including Russian) experience could be discussed and advocated. The ultimate reversion to a standard state-administrative model of policing should not obscure that.

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